



JAN 21 2009

United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

JAN 16 2009

1

Dear Mr. McGovern:

Thank you for your letter of December 16, 2008 regarding the upcoming legislative and presidential elections in El Salvador.

The Department of State is watching closely the preparations for the 2009 elections in El Salvador. Both Ambassador Glazer and Deputy Secretary Negroponte have noted publicly our desire for free, fair, and transparent elections in El Salvador and explained that the United States Government will respect the sovereign will of Salvadoran voters to elect their leaders. Your recommendations in support of the election process are timely and we will keep them in mind during our continued engagement with all Salvadoran political actors in the lead-up to the elections.

Worldwide interest in the Salvadoran elections is high. The United States has contributed approximately \$400,000 to support the Organization of American States' (OAS) election observer mission to El Salvador to monitor the January and March elections and has funded the establishment of a quick count mechanism to help foster confidence in the election results. After a year of technical cooperation between the OAS General Secretariat and the Salvadoran Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), OAS observers began arriving in El Salvador on December 1, 2008 and will stay through the March 15, 2009 presidential elections. The U.S. Embassy plans to send out its own observer teams as well and we are pleased by the European Union's recent decision to send additional observers. We have encouraged the long-term OAS mission to engage in a process of coordination and dialogue with observer groups and have recommended that they also pay particular attention to pre-election day processes, including citizen access to election identity documents.

The Department of State shares your concerns over electoral violence. As of mid-December, 2008 El Salvador's Human Rights Ombudsman (PDDH) had

The Honorable  
James P. McGovern,  
House of Representatives.

investigated six cases of electoral violence, despite the parties having signed a no-violence agreement on October 6, 2008. Ombudsman Oscar Luna has made it clear to all political parties that electoral violence is unacceptable. We agree.

While some procedural defects have been identified, overall we see the campaigns and the electoral process as proceeding in accordance with democratic principles. On October 15, 2008 in compliance with its 2007 cooperation agreement with the TSE to carry out an integral audit of the Salvadoran Electoral Registry, the OAS released a technical plan detailing electoral reform recommendations for implementation prior to the January and March elections. The TSE has acted on a number of the recommendations; others of a more long-term nature were simply received too late to be put into place for this election cycle.

We share your view that the 2009 elections have the potential to be very close races and, as such, transparency and legitimacy are of the utmost importance. We will continue to monitor developments as the elections approach.

We hope this information is helpful in addressing your concerns. Please feel free to contact us further on this or any matter of concern to you.

Sincerely,



Matthew A. Reynolds  
Assistant Secretary  
Legislative Affairs